

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 6, 2012

COMMITTEES:
ENVIRONMENT AND
PUBLIC WORKS
HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS
BANKING, HOUSING,
AND URBAN AFFAIRS
BUDGET

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

I write to express my strong support for your Administration's announcement that the United States will complete its transition from major combat operations in Afghanistan to a "training, advice and assist role" by mid-to-late 2013.

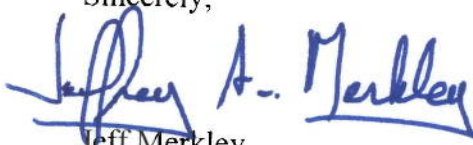
While I understand that there are questions surrounding NATO's timeline in the aftermath of these comments, I urge you not only to stand by them but to consider every possible option to accelerate the process of bringing the war in Afghanistan to an end.

We have achieved our original main objectives in Afghanistan. We have destroyed al Qaeda training camps and we have brought to justice those responsible for the 9-11 attacks. The nation-building strategy we adopted later, on the other hand, continues to face enormous obstacles and consumes an enormous share of military and economic resources. Moreover, there is no evidence that extending the U.S. combat role through 2014 is likely to materially impact the stated goals of leaving an Afghan military capable of securing the country and of developing a central government capable of delivering services and commanding the respect and loyalty of the Afghan people. There are simply too many key variables outside the control of American combat forces.

The latest National Intelligence Estimate released last month, indeed, casts doubt on claims of significant process in the nation-building strategy. As the Los Angeles Times put it, the Intelligence Estimate posited that any "gains were not enough to bolster the weak central government in Kabul, haven't diminished the Taliban's will to keep fighting, and haven't instilled confidence among Afghans in much of the country."

Having achieved the original key objectives of our strategy in Afghanistan, it's time to end this war. We should instead commit our national security resources to a strategy of confronting terrorist threats wherever they may reside. Accelerating the transition from combat operations in Afghanistan will help us better pursue this mission and make our nation stronger and more secure.

Sincerely,



Jeff Merkley
United States Senator